Elgin Museum and Historical Society

August, 2018

BLUE MOUNTAIN BOYS

Call them Ambassadors of good will, promoters of commercial interests, or just fun loving businessmen having a good time, the Blue Mountain Boys made their mark in the area beginning August of 1957. Dressed in faded bib overalls (that were never washed), blue work shirts, hats with a minimum 12 inch crown, mangled wigs, and a beard helping disguise the identity, the "boys" would arrive at events unsuspectingly, often in their 1923 Dodge pickup dubbed the "Mash Mangler." They often stated the Mash Mangler would be hooked to their still for distilling process purposes. Those who were closest to the characters would often complain about the smell of the participants, particularly the clothing.

The fun-filled group always used mysterious mountain men names such as Zeke, Hank, Lafe or Snuffy. The secretive lot used shotguns, corn cob pipes, and jugs with suspect liquids. A blast from the unsuspected shotgun would often cause the most hearty to jump out of their own drawers.

Legendary events included such things as exploding outhouses, a broken window, and live chickens (barely), or dead skunks.

According to Dick Calhoun of the September 13th Observer, the group was brazen enough to stroll into U.S. National Bank with the pretense of a major robbery, but instead seeking a loan of $4200 to purchase a trailer. After tying up the manager, Ralph Nelson, the boys departed off in their Mash Mangler, shooting their shotguns and hooting over the success of the loan. Of course, the employees and guests burst out in a loud applause for the successful "heist."

Not only did the Blue Mountain Boys attend many events around the state, they also managed to make "the acquaintance" of notable individuals.

According to the Observer, Governor Homes was the first high ranking individual to be honored by the "Ornery," as he spoke at Eastern Oregon College. Given the membership of honor, Governor Holmes received the card and a fresh dead squirrel skin as an honor.

Governor Mark Hatfield was also honored July 24th, 1959 at a banquet given to honor him. Entering with the typical stench of dirt (and perhaps remains of the dead squirrel), the Governor was honored with a bear skin. During the event the Mountain boys commented, "We jest wanted you to know y're on the right side," to which the governor gave my uncle, Democratic Sen. Dwight Hopkins, "the look."

The Blue Mountain Boys even stormed the capital August 21st, 1981, where they presented Governor Vic Atiyah shirts, overalls, and beards. For these fine gifts, the Boys were escorted through the capital, and given a lesson on how government really works.

For over 50 years the organization kept their anonymity, performing in various communities and spreading the good will of Union County. The charter members have all passed, but true to their

goals, the identities of the Blue Mountain Boys remain a mystery.

For information and photographs of the Blue Mountain Boys, contact John E, Turner of La Grande with his latest publication-- La Grande Blue Mountain Boys, published in 2016.

The Blue Mountain Boys participated in many events, including the Elgin Stampede. The "Mash Mangler" and Blue Mountain Boys-- photo by Joy Wheeler of Elgin.

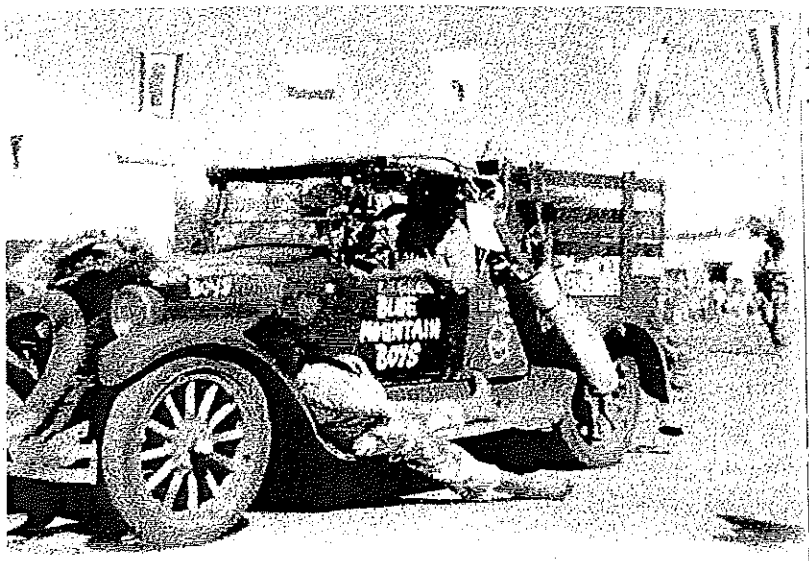

Photo courtesy of Joy A. Wheeler
Elgin, Oregon

ELGIN MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

c/o 68070 Hunter Road
Summerville, Oregon 97876

Phone: 541-534-4390 or 541-437-9821 (Everett)

Directors: Gerald Hopkins, President
Everett Grandeen, Vice-President
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Summerville, Oregon 97876
Phone: 541-534-4390 or 541-437-982

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HAY IN THE VALLEY

Based on the History of Elgin, Oregon by Bernal Hug Sr., in 1919, the county agent encouraged Earl Chandler to plant a field of sweet clover. It attracted a lot of attention at the time, and then later discovered that an application of sulfur would immensely increase the production of alfalfa. Both alfalfa and various grass mixtures began to gain popularity in production after encouragement and information from the Elgin Soil and Conservation.

OREGON TRAIL TRIVIA

Question: How deep were ruts carved into the sandstone of Mitchell Pass?

Ans: In order to avoid the massive sandstone formation at Scotts Bluff, 596 miles west of Independence, Missouri, emigrants took the narrow route through Mitchell Pass. Today the ruts, located near the town of Gering, Nebraska, are eight feet deep and stand as mute testimony to the number of wagons that passed this way.

LEVETA BOTZ, BRIDE OF 64 YEARS

This December LeVeta Botz will mark her marriage to husband Ed for 64 years, "and to the same man is unusual these days!"

LeVeta was born in Enterprise and attended the Minam School until 13 years of age. "I was at the bottom. In those days you lined up against the blackboard and couldn't sit down until you learned your ABC's and times tables." Her mother and father were Violet and Bob Sasser and "I got called 'Sassy' during my school days."

Although her grandfather moved from Kentucky in four days, it would take him a week to drive a wagon from Elgin to Enterprise. With the grade, she said, the wheels would have to be continually locked with a log to keep from rolling.

LeVeta moved to Elgin to start her freshman year in what is now Stella Mayfield School. She recalled her longtime friendship with Betty Knapp and Barbara Sulton (Bickle). "Barbara was born the same day in in the same house we have now. It was a hospital at the time." Leveta said the friends were really very good in school, but laughed saying, "They only got ornery after I left."

LeVeta married Ed Botz in December of 1954 and moved to Imbler. "I tried to grow a garden in that great soil, but didn't do well at all. Two older neighbors came over and asked, 'What are you growing—marble potatoes?' I went inside the house and cried. I was only 17 years old. I just didn't know what I was doing." After a year, she and Ed moved out to his folks' farm, where they lived for 28 years. Ed's parents were Bill and Iola Botz. The farm was located on the Valley View Road. "We had to milk 17 cows by hand before Ed would go to the mill at 6:00 a.m. I drove the school bus for 28 years. It was a rough but good life on the ranch. We didn't have enough water from the well to shower and flush the water at the same time. I remember one time a cow died. We took it out and buried it the best we could. It was a very rocky soil and difficult to dig. We got the cow buried, but it bloated and swelled up so its feet were sticking out. Doris Howell came over and tripped on the feet."

Although life was good but hard, the "sad" years followed when Ed was diagnosed with cancer, and unable to work for three years. "We ended up losing the home and had to trade in our five trucks, which kept breaking down when we had them." The 101 acre farm sold for $54,000. "It was in the first part of the 80's and everyone was losing their farms."

"Driving the school bus was a wonderful job and they were wonderful kids." Then Ed and LeVeta started the Country Kitchen, which they had for 19-20 years. "All of us worked, and mom was a wonderful cook and she worked for Otis Payne as a head cook for 21 years." They purchased the Timbers Cafe, but after a three year period, a payroll robbery created a situation of having to close. So the Botz family decided to convert their Elgin home into a Bed and Breakfast, going by the name of The Stagecoach Stop. The home is the former Elgin Hospital, which then converted to the Peterson apartments before it was sold by Les Pruitt in 1990. It consists of 5400 square feet, six bedrooms and four bathrooms.

The couple had four girls: Pam Davis, Cindy Chandler, Teresa Martin and Sandra Lathrop. LeVeta is proud of their success and noted they had all been involved in the Elgin Stampede. Cindy and Sandra were both Stampede queens, while Pam and Teresa were honored as princesses. LeVeta added that the family has grown so much that 59 blood relatives attended a reunion held two years earlier, adding that "not one of them smokes."

"I have loved Elgin so much," LeVeta noted, "and worked on many projects to make it better. Some of the projects included the Rural Development Committee, helped originate the Christmas parade, worked on water for the sewers, community Christmas tree, the Elgin Stampede, and cleaned Henderson Park. "I got grass seed from Imbler and we seeded and reseeded the park. The McVey's and I cleaned knapweed until our hands bled." When the Sniders (later Otis)

restaurant burned we cleaned up the city park. We found several items including keys melted together and a glass container that didn't have a chip." The Houser Hardware and a small doughnut shop were a part of the fire. The cleanup involved peeling up tile in the ground. She noted that Ed had gone out on the Minam grade and picked up the fountain, which is located in the city park. LeVeta continued to help individuals as well. "We helped a family where the kids didn't even have shoes and let them live in the apartment for six months."

LaVeta loves dancing and music. "That man of mine can dance your legs off. Ed chaperoned every dance and would dance with every one of the kids. I also like people and enjoy visiting with them. I am not into soap operas," she added, "but we do watch news and musical shows."

PRONGHORN ANTELOPE

The Pronghorn antelope was a common resident of Oregon in the early 1900's, being found mainly in the open desert areas. However, uncontrolled hunting soon left populations limited to sparse numbers in a few limited spots.

In an all out effort to prevent complete elimination of the antelope in Oregon, Hart Mt. Refuge was established in 1936. Here animals were trapped from various locations, including Canada, and grouped together at Hart Mt. Once this herd was well established, animals were transplanted to various locations in Eastern Oregon. The pronghorns at Ladd Marsh originated from a transplanted herd located just this side of Baker City.

The pronghorn, which is about the size of our Whitetail, has an over-sized heart and lungs, which allows it to run at speeds over 40 mph. It has extremely good eye-sight and can detect a moving object from over a mile in distance.

Because of its running speed and endurance, an adult antelope is seldom run down by predators. The big weakness is the vulnerability of the young shortly after birth. Antelope habitat, which offers sparse, vegetative cover, makes it easy for predators like coyotes to find the young. Control of coyotes on the birthing grounds has been a very successful tool in increasing young survival.

In certain locations the pronghorn can cause major damage to agricultural crops, especially alfalfa. Irrigated alfalfa fields in high desert areas will draw antelope from a great distance. Herds numbering up to 300 are not unusual in using these fields. Trapping these animals and moving them to other sites has been somewhat successful.

Antelope not used to fences have problems finding their way through. They seem reluctant to jump and have problems jumping a fence over 40 inches in height. They can usually crawl through a three or four strand barbwire fence, but a combination woven and barbwire fence presents a real barrier.

These animals seem to be gradually accepting forested habitats. This is especially true in the Ochocos where herds can be found in pine and fir forests.

Looking to the future, I can see the herds increasing both in numbers and into new areas. It would not be surprising to see antelope expand their range throughout both Union and Wallowa counties.

By Harlan Scott